

Zoo Techniques in the Stock Market

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In teaching English for specific purposes (ESP) to students in the business school at the university, one of the most common problems has been that of learning technical vocabulary. For example, a well-known term in business English is turnover, a word referring to the total value of the goods or services a company has sold during a particular period of time. However, this word also refers to a delicious small piece of pastry. This is an example of a vocabulary problem in language activities.

Our objective has been to minimize these confusions by using visuals with written and spoken words, and to find effective ways of promoting learning and generating motivation.

In this article I outline an activity that has helped our students learn by association and has allowed them to enjoy the activity as they do it.

Stock market vocabulary activity

University teachers often believe that learners may find a task childish if it involves using imagination, games, or drawings. However, we discovered that the more amusing the exercises, the better and more successful were the learning results. Since our preliminary goal has been to introduce students to the specific meanings of business vocabulary and to avoid confusions, we have used visual illustrations.

One specific context where double meanings often occur is in stock market terminology, an important area for business and economics students. We initially focus on the animal world, because several animal expressions and terms have particular meanings in the stock market.

Purpose

The main purpose of this activity is not only to introduce the students to these specific terms, but also to use a methodology that allows us to reach our desired goal. This exercise is handed out at the beginning of the year to show students that the vocabulary they will need in this area is not so difficult. The activity is divided into three different stages.

Stage one

First, the students are given a sheet of paper with pictures of the various animals (See Figure 1 below). The learners are asked to write the names of these animals under their pictures. Then students are asked to imagine what the meanings of these words might be as they relate to the stock market. Finally, students must match the financial meanings of the terms with the appropriate drawings.

Stage two

After the students have completed this first exercise, in small groups, they discuss the possible meanings of the words.

The students are provided with blank grids where they can list the particular characteristics of the animals under various headings. This gives the students opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge of the specialized terms they need to find out. When they have completed their grids, they are given one that we have completed (See Figure 2 below). Now they continue their discussions, but this time they are able to support their conclusions with additional information.

Stage three

After the students have finished, they are given the list of expressions and terms that correspond to the animal illustrations (See Figure 3 below). Working individually, students concentrate on finding out the answers so that they can recall both the animals and the meanings more easily.

The Results

At the end of the term and without advance notice, the learners are asked to do the same exercise again. Our intention is to discover how well they remember these stock market terms, and if they can use the images of the animals to trigger their memories.

The first time the students did the exercise, the results were not very satisfactory. The first stage, which consisted of naming the animals, presented no difficulty to the students. However, during the second stage, (the chart), the learners could identify only four out of the fourteen: bull, bear, dragon, and snake. The rest of the drawings were either unexplained or misunderstood. The students did much better on the match-up exercise, but there were still four terms that students could not match: cats and dogs, dog, stag, and rat race.

These results were not completely disheartening because it was the first time the students had done this type of activity. In addition, many answers were related to the animal features. In spite of the fact that this was not the main objective of the exercise, the brainstorming session proved to be a very resourceful tool in the learning process.

The results the second time were more positive. Most learners matched the animals to one specific term or another, and were able to recall the specialized terms. This led us to conclude that images do help students not only to learn the specific words, but also to remember them.

After completing the exercise, the students were asked for their impressions of the activity. Most stated that it was easier to acquire specific vocabulary by linking the drawings with the meanings. Thus, pictures helped establish a relationship between the animals and their significance in the stock market.

Conclusion

One of the main objectives we seek is not only to teach students specific and useful vocabulary, but also to help them assimilate the new words. This exercise has proved to be an effective way of increasing learners' interests and motivating them. The different stages in the activity led them to finding answers, thereby reinforcing their learning process. Moreover, when the groups discuss the possible meanings of the words, students become aware of the variety of possibilities and are able to recall all the information they knew about the stock exchange. When trying to guess the meanings of the words, students focus on characteristics of the animals. Once the exercise is completed, students are provided immediate feedback by checking the answer key.

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Figure 1

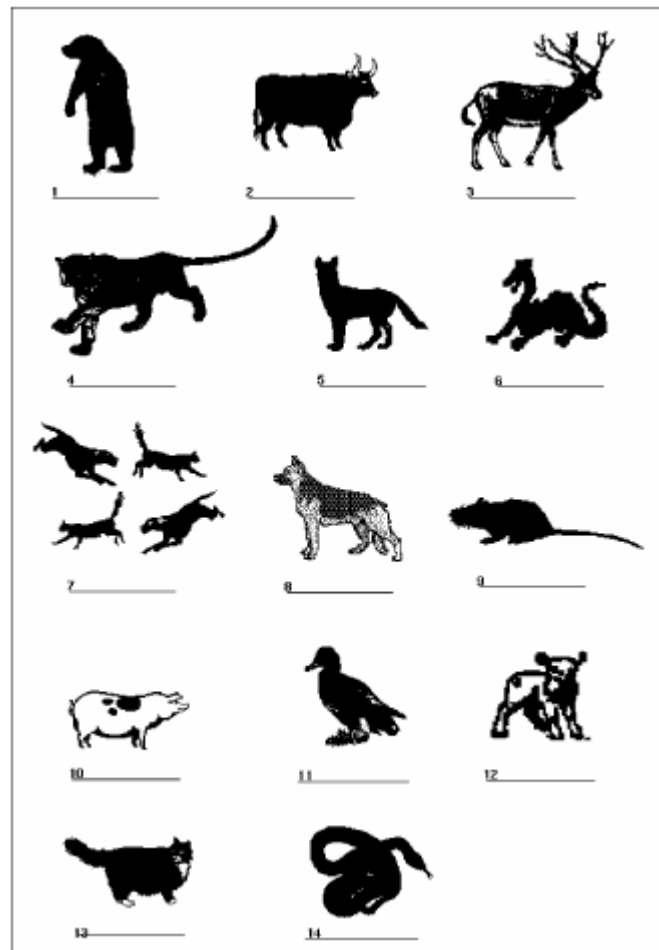


Figure 2

ANIMAL	COLOR	SIZE	MOBILITY	HABITAT	SYMBOLISM
Bear	White/greyish brown	Big and clumsy	Lumbering	Forest/Arctic	Sluggishness
Bull	Shiny black	Big and bulky	Plodding	Meadow	Power
Stag	Fawn	Big and bouncing	Trotting	Woods	Independence
Tiger	Striped yellow	Big and stalking	Restless	Jungle	Security
Dingo	Chestnut	Medium-sized and wild	Moving fast	Australia	Native of outback
Dragon	Colorful	Huge	Flying	Asia/Old castles	Emblem of Far East
Cats and Dogs	Lifeless color	Medium-sized pets	Whisking around	Home	Bad company
Rat	Earth colors	Small and nesty	Scrambling	Underground	Ferocious
Pig	Rosy pink	Big and fat	Moving slowly	Farm	Overabundance
Duck	White/brown	Small and waddling	Scampering	Farm/water	Unsteady
Lamb	Snowy white	Medium-sized and lovable	Hopping	Farm/country	Innocence/vulnerability
Snake	Great variety	Long and thin	Crawling	Along the ground	Sneaky, unreliable

Figure 3

1. Bear	A. Treasury investors' growth receipt
2. Bull	B. Investments which produce indirect incomes
3. Stag	C. An insolvent speculator
4. Tiger	D. A misleading surge in shares after a sudden fall
5. Dingo	E. Aggressive competition
6. Dragon: Dragon Market	F. Fluctuations in the monetary system
7. Cats and Dogs	G. A free-lance speculator who buys and sells very quickly
8. Dog	H. Asian countries' stock market
9. Rat: Rat Race	I. Zero coupon bond denominated in Australian dollars
10. Pig	J. When the prices of shares are likely to rise
11. Duck: Lame Duck	K. An inexperienced market speculator
12. Lamb	L. When the prices of shares are likely to drop
13. Cat: Dead Cat Bounce	M. A firm with a low market share
14. Snake	N. Shares with little stability

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